

FIRE ANT TRAP

Field of the Invention

The present invention relates generally to the eradication of insects and, in particular, to an eradicator dispensing trap for fire ants.

Background of the Invention

Fire ant infestation is spreading rapidly along the southern and gulf coast areas where the warm and humid climates are well suited for propagation. The fire ants are extremely voracious and pose significant economic problems to crops, foliage, livestock, and agricultural operations. The fire ants are also aggressive when disturbed, swarming and stinging the source and resulting in burning pains and itching pustules. While not generally resulting in serious permanent injury to non-allergic individuals, the presence of fire ant colonies and fear of attack oftentimes results in an abandonment of the colonized area.

Various devices and chemical and heat treatments have been developed for controlling existing colonies. Many, however, are large and complex best suited for use by professional operators and not suited for consumer residential use. Where fire ant traps and bait stations have been targeted for consumer use, they have fallen short of accounting for all the complexities in effectively eradicating the colony.

The fire ants live below ground in a network of chambers and tunnels evidenced on the surface by mound that may be several inches in height and feet in diameter. When disturbed by traps and bait stations implanted at the

mound, such as disclosed in United States Patent Nos. 5,746,021 to Green, and 5,325,626 to Jackson, the fire ants are not confined and tend to swarm toward the applicator inflicting bites. Moreover, the implanting may cause the colony to abandon the site. Accordingly, the queen may exit the mound and reestablish a new colony at a proximate location. Further, the devices may be dislodged providing access to potentially toxic and irritating compounds, posing particular problems to children and pets. Additionally, the eradicating agents employed can be rendered ineffective in the presence of precipitation.

Accordingly, it would be desirable to provide a device usable by non-professionals that could be safely and securely installed at the mound, that would prevent abandonment of reproductive ants and queens, and that would allow dispensing of the eradicating agents without alarming the colony to the point of abandonment, would promote transfer of the agents throughout the colony, and would not be subject to reduction in efficacy in the presence of varying environmental conditions.

Brief Summary of the Invention

The present invention provides a fire ant trap fulfilling the above objectives wherein a cover is placed over the mound with an outer ring engaging the periphery thereof thereby providing a walled barrier limiting escape. The cover is provided with sliding stakes for securing the cover in place. The peripheral attachment is minimally invasive to the mound and does not promote aggressive or abandoning activity. The stake attachment

also prevents dislodging after installation to the resultant benefit of children and pets. The top of the cover is provided with a treaded collar for receiving a tubular auger having a perforated end section with a beveled tip. When the auger is threaded into the collar the tip rotates and advances thereby locally disturbing the soil and attracting the ants. After tip insertion, the desired eradication agent is dispensed through the auger passage for transfer by the ants to the colony resulting in the destruction of the colony in a short period of time, a day or less. After use, the stakes may be raised and stored on the cover, and the trap stored or moved to a subsequent site.

Description of the Drawings

The above and other features and advantages of the invention will become apparent upon reading the following detailed description taken in conjunction with the accompanying drawings in which:

Figure 1 is a side elevational view of a fire ant trap in accordance with a preferred embodiment of the invention;

Figure 2 is a side cross sectional view of the fire ant trap disposed over the fire ant mound with the dispensing auger in the raised position;

Figure 3 is a side cross sectional view of the fire ant trap of Figure 1 disposed over a fire ant mound with the dispensing auger in the dispensing position;

Figure 4 is an enlarged fragmentary cross sectional view of the stake guide bracket taken along line 4-4 in Figure 1;

Figure 5 is an enlarged fragmentary side view of the stake guide bracket as shown in Figure 4;

Figure 6 is an enlarged fragmentary front view of the stake removal handle; and

Figure 7 is a bottom view of the stake removal handle as shown in Figure 6.

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Detailed Description of the Preferred Embodiment

Referring to the drawings, Figures 1 and 3 illustrates a fire ant trap 10 including a thin wall domed cover 12 overlying a fire ant mound 14. The cover 12 is peripherally secured to the ground 16 around the mound 14 by a plurality of circumferentially spaced stakes 18. The cover 12 carries a telescoping dispensing auger assembly 20 for penetrating and disturbing the top of the mound 12 and for distributing a species appropriate eradicating agent 22 through a dispensing collar 24 sealed by a removable plug 26. Such agents specific to fire ants are available in granular, liquid and powdered form, as well as the active ingredients in bait matrices. After installation, the fire ants carry the agent interior of the mound for the common ingestion by the colony for the ultimate eradication of the ant colony, including the queen within a period of days, while preventing the escape of the species, inadvertent dislodging of the cover, access to the pesticide by children or pets, or pesticide loss from precipitation. After

eradication, the stakes 18 may be withdrawn and stowed on the cover, and the trap stored compactly for reuse.

The cover 12 is thin wall, one-piece plastic member forming an inverted downwardly opening cavity 30 defined by a frustoconical side 32 upwardly terminating with a circular top 34 and downwardly terminating at an annular rim including an outwardly turned annular flange 36. The cover may take varying sizes and shapes depending on the size of the mounds to be treated. It has been determined that a cavity of about 12 inches will handle a significant portion of mounds likely to be encountered in residential. Even if the mound size is larger, the cover encompasses sufficient area to limit escape. The top 34 is provided with a coaxial opening for receiving and mounting the auger assembly 20.

Referring additionally to Figure 2, the auger assembly 20 comprises a cylindrical mounting collar 40 having a coaxial threaded bore, a beveled and perforated cylindrical auger 42 having an upper end connected with the dispensing collar 24 at an externally threaded sleeve 44 received in the threaded bore of the collar, and the plug 36 carried by the dispensing collar 24. The auger 42, sleeve 44 and collar 24 form a center vertical passage 46 for dispensing pesticide introduced at the collar 24. The auger 42 is provided with a plurality of perforations 47 and a beveled end tip 48. The perforations 47 permit dispersion of the agent 22 as well as ant access thereto. The beveled end tip 48 allows for initial penetration of the top of the mound without significant disturbance and upon rotation and gradual

auguring if the mound soil. A bevel angle in the range of about 30^0 to 60^0 is preferred. Alternatively, the sleeve 44 and the bore in the collar may provide non-threaded sliding fits whereby the bevel end tip is manually lowered and rotating for achieving the above effect. The tip 48 in the lowered position is proximate the plane of the flange 36 and preferably slightly thereabove, thus limiting the penetration of the mound and providing assembly storage within the confines of the cover envelope.

The collar 40 is formed of a plastic material and attached on the upper surface of the top 34 by fasteners 49 coaxial with the opening therein. Alternatively, the collar 40 may be formed integrally with the cover.

The dispensing collar 24 and the sleeve 44 are integrally formed of a plastic material. The collar 24 has an annular base 50 registering with the passage 46 and an upwardly extending cylindrical sidewall 52, the inner surfaces of which define an upwardly opening cavity 54 for receiving the agent 22. The plug 26 is a one-piece plastic molding having solid cylindrical tip 56 having a light compressive fit with the side wall 52 and an enlarged circular shoulder 58 for manual gripping by the operator for insertion and removal, whereby in the closed position, the passage 26 is sealed to prevent exit by the enclosed fire ants.

The stakes 18 are disposed about the periphery of the side wall 44 of the enclosure 12. Each stake 18 includes a pointed shank 70 and enlarged head 72. The shank 70 is inserted through a center opening on a removal handle 74. In the raised position, the handle 74 is releasably attached to the side 32

by a hook and loop fastener assembly 76. One part of the assembly is adhesively attached to the handle 74 and the other part is adhesively attached to the side wall. The lower end of the shank 70 is received through a guide 78 attached at the lower end of the side wall 32. The tip of the shank registers with a hole formed in the flange 36. As shown in Figures 4 and 5, the guide 78 includes generally V-shaped center section 80 with outwardly extending legs 82 attached to the side wall of the cover. The center section provides an enlarged vertical passage having a substantial clearance with the shank permitting flexible alignment for installing the stakes while limiting movement in the raised position. Referring to Figures 6 and 7 the handle 74 includes a center cylindrical hub 84 having a center vertical hole for slidably receiving the shank 70 of the stake 18. Tabs 86 extend laterally from the hub 84 and provide gripping surfaces for manually removing an embedded stake. For inserting the stakes, the handle 74 is outwardly shifted to separate the fastener assembly 76 and the stake vertically oriented and manually or mechanically embedded in the ground until the head 72 and handle 74 engage the guide 78, thereby securing the cover over the mound to prevent inadvertent dislodging, access to the pesticide by children or pets, and material degradation from precipitation.

For installation and eradication of the colony, the cover 12, with the auger assembly 20 loosen or removed, is centered over the mound 14 and the stakes 18 embedded. The auger assembly 20 is then inserted in the collar 40 whereby the beveled end tip 48 lances into the upper portion of the

mound. Thereafter, the auger assembly 20 is rotated whereby the sleeve 44 is threaded into the collar 40, thereby rotating and axially downwardly advancing the tip 48 resulting in an auguring of the mound soil disturbing and attracting the ants to the surface. Next, the agent 22 is dispensed into the collar 24 and downwardly through central passage 46 allowing the ants to access the agent 22 at the end or through the perforations 47. After dispensing, the plug 26 is inserted into the collar 24 thereby sealing the cavity 30. The trap 10 then remains securely in place, resisting dislodging movement, preventing unwanted access to the agent by children and pets and escape of the ants, shielding the agent from moisture degradation. In a day or so, the stakes 18 may be removed and stowed in the raised position at the fastener assembly 76, and the trap 10 conveniently stored or used at additional infestation sites.

Having thus described a presently preferred embodiment of the present invention, it will now be appreciated that the objects of the invention have been fully achieved, and it will be understood by those skilled in the art that many changes in construction and widely differing embodiments and applications of the invention will suggest themselves without departing from the spirit and scope of the present invention. The disclosures and description herein are intended to be illustrative and are not in any sense limiting of the invention, which is defined solely in accordance with the following claim.